



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The New Orphan Crisis – Part 2

Guest(s): John, Marlene and Hannah Strege

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Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello everyone. I'm James Dobson and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome back to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and on today's program, the Strege Family returns. John Strege, his wife Marlene, and their daughter Hannah, are joining us again for the conclusion of a fascinating conversation with Gary Bauer. Now, John and Marlene Strege were the first couple ever to adopt a fertilized egg, a frozen embryo, or as they refer to them, a snowflake baby. That adoption resulted in a successful pregnancy and the birth of their daughter, Hannah. John Strege is a semi-retired sports writer and author. He's had two *New York Times* best-selling books. His wife Marlene, is a retired occupational therapist, and together they are the parents of the first snowflake child, their daughter Hannah.

Now, John Strege has written about the Strege Family journey in his book called *A Snowflake Named Hannah*, and we have information on that book at our website drjamesdobson.org. Now, if you missed the first part of the conversation yesterday, you'll definitely want to listen to it again. And remember, you can do so at our website, drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

In part one, John and Marlene shared their remarkable story of how they brought Hannah into the world. Now in today's program, the Strege Family will share with us how Hannah's life has paved the way for other snowflake children to be adopted as well as to protect the sanctity of human life. So let's now join John, Marlene, and Hannah Strege with our co-host Gary Bauer, right here on Family Talk.

Gary Bauer: Marlene, you were testifying specifically about this process because the Congress was considering whether it should be regulated or what was it that brought you there as a witness?

Marlene Strege: It was regarding federal funding for embryonic stem cell. And we saved Hannah's cord stem cells when she was born. So we weren't against stem cell research. We were against using our daughter for that research.

Gary Bauer: Of course. Yes.

Marlene Strege: And actually when we adopted Hannah, she was too young for the research. She would've had to been grown in the lab till she reached the blastocyst stage, and then they would've extracted her stem cells, which kills the child. So that's what we were testifying against. We were showing Hannah in the Petri dish day of thaw and the next day, day of transfer. And the doctors had told me she'd gone to her next stage of development overnight in the Petri dish called compaction, where the cells are starting to move to one side. This was outside my body.

And the other thing I think I believe I said was I didn't add anything to Hannah to make her a human life. I added oxygen, nutrients, a warm place to grow, and love. I'm the adoptive mom. So that's what all these snowflake moms across the country, even today, they're not creating their child, they're sustaining their child. And as Dr. Dobson liked to say, it's nine months before you traditionally adopt.

Gary Bauer: That's fantastic. I've testified before Congress many times. I was in the Regan administration for eight years, and so I often had to go up and testify, and it usually was a very unpleasant experience, very hostile, very combative. I'm assuming and hoping that your testimony was not something where you were put through the ringer, or was it challenging?

Marlene Strege: Well, let tell you, I lost nine pounds in three weeks preparing.

Gary Bauer: Before or after?

Marlene Strege: No, preparing for this. Because before that, when we were with Dr. Dobson on broadcast, we used pseudonyms. I wanted to be a mom. I didn't want to be... So sure, I'll do the broadcast, but I am first and foremost a mom. But when you go before Congress, you have to use your real name. You have to tell where you're from. And I couldn't ask Hannah if at two, is this something that you want to do? And I remember praying about that and it was so clear that God was speaking to me and saying, "Marlene, wouldn't I give you the right child for this task?" And again, I counseled with Dr. Dobson and he says, "Marlene, it appears that the Lord has prepared you for such a time as this. I have two words for you, do it."

And at that same time period, Hannah was into Veggie Tales and she was listening to Queen Esther, and I just remember that so clearly. In fact, I had the lyrics to the song right there when I was testifying so I could look down at them, about being prepared for such a time as this. We have a saying in our home that God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called. And so I think that's truly what had happened. So between that and then afterwards came lobbying, we went several years to lobby congressmen and then senators. Then in 2006, we stood behind President Bush for his first veto where he vetoed the federal funding with the snowflake children behind him on the stage in the East Room of the White House. Gary, you might have been there for that, I'm not sure.

Gary Bauer: I was around. I can tell you that. Dr. Dobson and I of course were heavily, I know it's a bad word in some corners, we were heavily lobbying the Bush administration to do the right thing and reminding them that one of the reasons he won a very close election was that the votes of millions of people that believed in the God of the Bible and thought that a Bush presidency would be a presidency, that on many issues would align with that. And I know we were worried, but we were all very relieved when he did the right thing.

Marlene Strege: And really the snowflake children put a face to his policy. I just remember that moment standing behind him with Hannah, and he turned to the children and said, "These children are not spare parts, and we're not going to use the federal funds to do research on these human embryos." And then fast forward to the Dobbs decision. And if I can tell you our input with that-

Gary Bauer: I do, I want to talk about that at some length. If we could just stay here for a second. I know you'll recall, because I remember, and you all were right at ground zero. When you took this position that your daughter is not to be used for spare parts when she's an embryo, what happened? There's this powerful force in America that tried to paint families like yours and people like then President Bush and Dr. Dobson, anybody that stood for the dignity and safety of every human life were somehow pictured as being mean because they weren't willing to help somebody else or allow one human being to be used for parts to keep another human being alive. I think just so indicative of how much of the debate in America on really important things get shut down by finger pointers and people that really promote all kinds of propaganda instead of actually talking about the issue at hand.

Marlene Strege: And I at that time was an occupational therapist working in hospitals with people with those disabilities. And of course we want cures for those disabilities and diseases, but at what expense? What they were saying is if you use those embryos, so you're offering a life for a life. So you're going to exchange my daughter's life for someone else's life. And again, there had been no cures from those embryonic stem cells. It's all come from adult stem cell. And like I said, we saved her cord stem cells. So that cord stem cells is there for her life. We have it frozen and should she need it, it's her own blood. So I would argue that with those people.

Gary Bauer: Sure. I'm not a scientist and I don't know a lot of the scientific background, but you mentioned a million, million and a half frozen embryos now. How long is there a period of time they can remain frozen without perishing eventually? Do we know that yet?

Marlene Strege: So the longest frozen embryo that's been adopted has been 30 years.

Gary Bauer: Wow.

Marlene Strege: Who knows, I guess, how long.

Gary Bauer: In our listening audience, many people listening in are families that are having problems starting a family, infertility problems, whatever. John and Marlene, is there any advice you would give to those families generally about the pressures that you were facing, the disappointment, how you got through that? Anything that you learned that you would want to say to people that might be facing the same thing?

Marlene Strege: Well, I remember going through the infertility treatments and the drugs. Now, we did not do IVF. But before that, there were infertility treatments and it seemed like every month when you didn't get pregnant, you wanted a baby even more. So you would do anything to have a baby. And so it's important to keep God at the center. I think the question that I've told people to ask is whatever the doctors are suggesting to you, ask the question, is this in the best interest of the child? Is it in the best interest to use donor egg and donor sperm to create a child? I will tell you that when that child is dating age, they're not going to have their whole genetic history. They might be dating a genetic sibling.

Gary Bauer: Interesting.

Marlene Strege: There was a documentary that was on a while ago that followed a sperm donor 10 years after he was a sperm donor in college. He had fathered 300 children. Now, those children, because of HIPAA laws, they don't know who each other is. So that creates a burden for those children. And so it's not about you, really. It's about the child and what's in the best interest of the child. I will tell you though, that John and I, what we discovered is we're not in love with our egg and our sperm. We're in love with the child. Adoption is amazing. We would do it all over again if we had that opportunity. And we see those babies being born all the time on Facebook. We're friends with a lot of the families. And there is no way that you'd say, "Oh, I really want my genetic child instead."

Gary Bauer: Sure, yes. Anything you would add to that, John?

John Strege: I'm sure a lot of these potential parents go through this. You're wondering, what are your friends going to think? What are your family members are going to think? And I'm sure we had some of that too, but there was no backlash whatsoever. Once we did it, maybe people were talking behind our back, I don't know. But it was... This is the best thing that ever happened to us. So again, we got no negative feedback from anybody we knew, and that was nice.

Gary Bauer: Well, that's fantastic to hear because that would've made a difficult situation challenging even more so.

Marlene Strege: I do want to add one more thing though. For women, this is a dream come true. That you can carry and give birth to your adopted child. It's a dream come true that I could experience everything. And people miss that this is a women's issue and people miss that, that we're choosing to give birth, because we long to give

birth, we long to be pregnant. And this is a way, an opportunity that you're able to do that in a way that we feel is God pleasing.

Gary Bauer: Has any research been done? I'm assuming, maybe I'm wrong, that most of the families that have done this adoption, are they Christian families by and large?

Marlene Strege: Yeah, I believe they are mostly. I am sure there's others too, but I know the families that we're in contact with are Christian.

Gary Bauer: Well, this unique history that your family has all wrapped up in the sanctity of human life and being trailblazers and so forth brings me to something else that you've been involved in that really is historic, and that's the issue of *Roe v. Wade*. Now, I think our audience knows the background, but let me give you just a little bit of it. Way back in 1850, unbelievably the Supreme Court of the United States decided, and it embarrasses me even to say it out loud now, back in the 1850s, 1860s, the courts decided that Black men and women, slaves, were not people for purposes of the Constitution. They were in effect property. And the poison of that decision turned State against State, brother against brother, split families, resulted in a Civil War. 650,000 people died to correct that mistake.

So we go all these years forward to 1973, and the court had before it the question of what is an unborn child? How can that unborn child be treated? And looking back, I would've thought that given the horrible mistake they made in the previous century, that every future court would've said, "Well, let's not make that mistake again." But they made exactly the same mistake. They took a whole class of people, our unborn children, and said of them, they have no rights we are bound to respect. They can be discarded like a Styrofoam cup. And they pretended that that decision was based in the Constitution, even though there is nothing in the Constitution that in any way suggests that there was some sort of fundamental right given by God to destroy your unborn child.

So we fast forward to 2022, the Dobbs case and something that Dr. Dobson and many of us and you all had prayed and worked for for decades, finally come to pass. The court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. I wish I could say they overturned *Roe v. Wade* and found a right to life. That's still coming, I hope. But they overturned *Roe* and they said, "This is something to be decided by the elected officials of America at all levels of government." So I'm sure you were cheering when that case was decided. But you played a unique role in this too. You filed what the legal term is, a friend of the court brief with the Supreme Court of the United States. So John or whoever would like to do this, tell me what led you to do that, and then what the essential argument was that you made in the brief.

Marlene Strege: I remember reading articles online about the Dobbs case. One was about the Justice Foundation and amicus briefs that they were submitting. I called the Justice Foundation and spoke to Alan Parker, who's the president. I told him I had a story that I thought might help him. So the Justice Foundation then decided to write an amicus brief featuring our daughter Hannah and her story

from frozen human embryo to born child. When I first asked Hannah too if she wanted to participate in this, I said, "You've been to the White House, you've been to Congress. This would be the Supreme Court, and this is *Roe v. Wade*. Is this something that you want to participate in?" Without flinching or hesitating, she said, "Absolutely." I just remember that moment so clearly.

So one of the points the brief centered on was the viability issue. In 1973, viability was about 28 weeks, but with the advent of technology and IVF and freezing human embryos, the viability line has been reduced to fertilization. In the brief, we showed the justices photos taken of Hannah in the Petri dish on day of thaw, and the next day, day of transfer. Hannah had progressed to her next stage of development overnight in the Petri dish, which can clearly be seen in the photographs. And additionally, I'm the adoptive mother. I didn't add anything to Hannah to make her a human life. I added oxygen, nutrients, a warm place to grow, and love, the same things we all need inside and outside the womb. And this proved that human life begins at fertilization.

Then the Biden administration asked for time to present during the oral arguments. It was granted by the justices. However, now their side now had 35 minutes and ours was 30 minutes. So there was an inequity of time because of an infrequently used provision allowing additional oral argument by amicus parties in extraordinary cases. Our attorneys requested from the Supreme Court the extra five minutes so our attorneys could present Hannah's story to the justices. The justices declined the motion, however, it was a win-win. In order for the justices to rule on the motion, the court had to read Hannah's amicus brief. There were over 120 amicus briefs submitted to the Supreme Court, and they ruled on our motion over a month ahead of time of the oral arguments. So they were familiar with Hannah's story before the case went to oral arguments. Only God knows though, if our amicus brief made an impact on the Supreme Court justices. However, we feel it did as it was such a unique approach and how the events unfolded of presenting the brief to the Supreme Court.

Gary Bauer:

I am sure it did have an impact. For all those years, the Supreme Court had opportunities to cut back *Roe* or do other things with *Roe v. Wade*, and it never happened. I think to a great extent because the ears of the justices did not want to hear those arguments. So much depends on who is sitting on the court. And the way God worked this out, when you came up with this powerful friend of the court brief that was filed, there were three new justices on the court that Dr. Dobson and I, and people like you and millions of Americans all over the country worked very hard to get confirmed. Those were brutal, brutal battles. I could tell you some hair-raising stories of things that happened in Washington, D.C. during those confirmations, including violence against Christians that came here to pray during those confirmation hearings.

So your brief was filed at exactly the right time. Hannah, you made history when you were the first snowflake, now young woman, and I doubt if any other snowflake has filed a brief with the Supreme Court of the United States. So

you've made history again. You're going to have a hard time for your encore. What do you got planned next?

Hannah Strege: I don't know. That's a question for God.

Gary Bauer: Yes, absolutely. I have no doubt there will be great things ahead and just living the life of a young woman in America and probably getting married, having your own children, we have no way to know what those ripples of life is going to do as we live our lives out.

Well, this is just fantastic to spend this time with you all. I want to reiterate how much fondness and I would even say love that Dr. Dobson and Shirley have for you and your family. They're sorry they couldn't be with us today, but I know Jim and Shirley will be listening to these shows, and I wouldn't be surprised if you hear from them again. And I wouldn't be surprised if all of us hear from your family again. You really have shown what it's like to be a Christian citizen in America. And this is a big theme here at JDFI.

We believe that every problem facing America, whether it's the respect for the sanctity of life, solving racism, educating our children correctly, fighting corruption, none of those problems can be solved without the active involvement of Bible believing Christian citizens. And you've shown what you could do turning a challenge in your personal lives into everything that's followed. And we believe that if every Christian family takes wherever they are and boldly does what you did, that we can still save this country and make it to shining city on a hill that our founders intended when they acknowledge that our liberty comes from God and not from government. So, God bless you all. God bless your family. We don't know each other that well, but I'm going to impose on you to ask that you periodically keep me up to date about what's happening in your lives, and we'll look for an opportunity to have you all back again. And John, I wondering if I could ask you to close us out with prayer?

John Strege: Yes. Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for this broadcast. Thank you for Gary Bauer and Dr. Dobson. Please get the word out. We love everything about Family Talk and the audience and more people need to know about this. Lord, we ask all of this in your name. Amen.

Marlene Strege: Amen.

Gary Bauer: Amen.

Hannah Strege: Amen.

Gary Bauer: Well, this has been fantastic to be with you the last couple of days. I want to thank you all. The Strege Family has made history a number of times. I'm sure you'll be doing even more in the months and years ahead. Dr. Dobson sends his

best, and I look forward to the next time when we can all be together, either on the air or in person.

Marlene Strege: It's always a pleasure. Thank you for having us on.

Gary Bauer: You're welcome.

Hannah Strege: Thank you, Gary.

John Strege: Thank you so much for everything you do.

Gary Bauer: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Well, amen. And what a beautiful prayer from John Strege to bring us to the conclusion of a two-part conversation featuring Gary Bauer and the Strege Family here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. Now, if you missed any part of the interview, simply visit our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk to listen again or to share this program with a friend or family member. And also if you are especially touched by the Strege Family story and would like to reach out to Hannah with thoughts, prayers, and words of encouragement, you can also contact our customer care team directly at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. You can also write to us via email on our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. We know that Hannah would love to hear from you.

Marriage is certainly a blessing, even when a challenge like infertility comes your way. When a husband and wife put God first, like the Streges did, and they take the time to understand each other's needs and commit to spending meaningful time together regularly, that's when a marriage will thrive.

In Ecclesiastes 4:12 we read, "Though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him, and a threefold cord is not quickly broken." And that is what we all want, a love that lasts a lifetime. If you and your spouse would like a closer relationship with God and each other, be sure to sign up for our special 10-day marriage series from the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. To take the challenge, all you have to do is visit drjamesdobson.org/10-daymarriageseries, then simply input your email address and click on the signup button and we'll take it from there. From the day you sign up for the next 10 consecutive days, you'll receive an encouraging email from Dr. James Dobson about how to strengthen your marriage. Now, the email will include some words of wisdom from Dr. Dobson himself and also some questions for you and your spouse to answer, and a prayer that you can conclude your time together with as well.

All marriages require intention, dedication, and hard work to realize the gifts that God has intended for that marriage. When you sprinkle in some love and trust and grace, you have a pretty nice recipe. So make sure you sign up today

for the 10-day marriage series. Just go to drjamesdobson.org/10daymarriageseries. I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of everyone here at the JDFI, thanks so much for joining us today. We pray that God will continue to richly bless you and your family as you grow stronger and deeper in your relationship with Him.

Announcer:

This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.